

First Nations
Education
Steering
Committee

Regional Sessions
1998/1999

Summary

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INTRODUCTION

Each year, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) holds a series of regional sessions in First Nations communities, during which the activities and work undertaken by FNESC throughout the past year are presented for discussion and feedback. In this way, FNESC gathers direct input and suggestions from representatives of First Nations communities, as well as direction regarding current issues. The regional sessions also help FNESC to maintain accountability; in addition to regular Steering Committee meetings and the Annual Provincial Conferences, FNESC reports to First Nations communities through the regional sessions, as well as through newsletters and communications about specific issues. In 1998/1999, regional sessions took place in Campbell River, Cranbrook, Kamloops, Kitimaat, Lillooet, Nanaimo, Osoyoos, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Vancouver, and Williams Lake. A summary of the 1997/1998 regional sessions was available at the regional sessions. Current FNESC publications are also available at regional sessions at no cost, with additional copies available for order through the FNESC office with a small charge to cover production and distribution expenses.

As Chief Nathan Matthew noted at several regional sessions, FNESC works as a collective organization to facilitate First Nations support for one another in the area of education. There is a need for an organization like FNESC, which can continually communicate with both the federal and provincial governments to ensure that First Nations concerns are being addressed, and to monitor their efforts at meeting the needs of First Nations learners are met.

FNESC also works to provide relevant and up-to-date information to First Nations about federal and provincial government policies and programs, to undertake research to support effective First Nations education, and to facilitate communication amongst First Nations and with other education organizations. In addition, FNESC strives to provide input to national level initiatives.

This report outlines a summary of the eleven sessions that took place in 1998/1999. Included is an overview of issues discussed at all sessions, for which there was generally consistent feedback. Comments particular to specific sessions are also included, with the relevant regional sessions identified in those cases.

REVIEW OF FNEESC ACTIVITIES

Ongoing activities undertaken by the FNEESC are outlined in its 1997/1998 Annual Report, which was made available at each regional session.

PROVINCIAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Each year, FNEESC organizes a provincial education conference to facilitate a sharing of information, ideas and inspiration. In 1998, the *Nexw7ay Provincial Aboriginal Education Conference* took place in Whistler, BC on November 8th and 9th.

The *Nexw7ay Conference* represented the first Annual Education Conference co-hosted by FNEESC and the BC Ministry of Education (MoE). In the past, the MoE and FNEESC had each organized separate Aboriginal Education Conferences, each with a similar intent – to consider ways to improve the quality of education available to First Nations learners. FNEESC had argued for some time in favour of a cooperative effort, to eliminate competition for resources and to allow people to participate together in one event, rather than having two Conferences with similar themes.

The *Nexw7ay Conference* was generally seen to be a great success. Almost 600 people with a range of backgrounds and experiences attended the event. John Kim Bell, founder of the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, and Drew Hayden-Taylor, an Ojibway playwright, each presented a keynote address. Grand Chief Ed John of the First Nations Summit Task Group and Minister Paul Ramsey of the BC MoE spoke on a luncheon panel, and a second panel included key representatives of the important partners in the public education system, including the BC

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Teachers' Federation, the BC School Superintendents' Association, the BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association, the BC School Superintendents' Association, and the MoE. In addition, a number of panel presentations and workshops provided a great deal of information, as well as an opportunity for people to come together to share their ideas.

FNESC hopes to continue to organize provincial education conferences with the MoE in upcoming years. The participants at the regional sessions all responded to the Conference with great enthusiasm, and agreed that the cooperative organization of one Conference is a practical and effective approach.

FNESC SUB-COMMITTEES

Adult Secondary Education Sub-Committee

The Adult Secondary Education Sub-Committee has been faced with significant challenges throughout the past several years, particularly in terms of clarifying DIA's adult education policy and compliance review procedures. In 1997, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) suggested that it was considering removing adults from the nominal roll. This suggestion raised tremendous concern for First Nations. To date, DIA is still accepting adults on the nominal roll, provided that they are working toward their Dogwood Diploma, and FNESC is continuing to work to protect the funding which now exists for adult education. FNESC has had some success in fighting for more flexibility in terms of compliance reviews, and DIA has also agreed to implement an appeals procedure, with a FNESC representative on the appeals committee. Work in this area will likely continue for some time.

Changes in provincial policy may also have some impact on those efforts, as DIA mirrors provincial policy in this area. Three changes in 1998/1999 are:

- the number of adults that can be listed on the provincial nominal roll was capped, so that there would be no increase in the number of adults eligible for funding;
- the Ministry developed a committee to determine how "success" should be defined for the purpose of its adult education policy. FNESC gained membership on that committee to keep up-to-date with its findings, as DIA may again mirror provincial policy in this area;

- students will now be able to access adult education in the college system free-of-charge. However, there will be no increase in the number of seats available through this system. In addition, the Ministry of Education has not yet responded to the question of who will pay the costs of First Nations students enrolled in the college system – the Ministry or DIA. FNEESC will continue to pursue this important issue.

In 1998/1999, FNEESC joined several Ministry committees struck to consider adult education issues, which provided an important opportunity to have input into and obtain information about provincial initiatives as they developed.

FNEESC also initiated a research project to determine the success of existing First Nations adult education programs, as well as a profile of their learners and program components. That research is intended to support ongoing discussions with the DIA about the design of a relevant adult education policy.

Participant Comments

Kitimaat Regional Session

Trying to meet compliance reviews was noted by several of the Kitimaat regional session participants as an extremely frustrating experience. The participants received inconsistent information from DIA, were allowed inadequate time to respond to DIA policies and review announcements, and spent significant time and resources trying to set up successful programs that met DIA funding criteria. The participants suggested that it is crucial to document all conversations and meetings with DIA very carefully in any discussions of adult education.

Lillooet Regional Session

One participant at the Lillooet regional session raised another concern, noting that many public colleges have been moving funding away from programs for First Nations students, based on an argument that programs for international students raise more money for the institutes.

Prince George Regional Session

The participants at the Prince George regional session also discussed problems related to DIA adult education program reviews. DIA, it was noted, was trying to conduct “telephone program reviews,” and was not providing adequate notice for reviews. Chief Nathan Matthew reported that the Department assured FNESC that all reviews would take place on-site, and that all program representatives would be given adequate notice of both the timing of the review, as well as the information that would be collected. Given these different perceptions, it was suggested that FNESC continue to work in this area. Chief Matthew also noted that FNESC is working with the Department to ensure that First Nations are allowed adequate time to respond to program review results, and address any problems that are raised regarding the compliance of their programs.

Williams Lake Regional Session

The participants in Williams Lake noted a real need for adult education programs in their area, but expressed concern about how to establish new programs now that DIA has capped adult education funding. This is a significant issue, given the long-term costs of not implementing programs, particularly in terms of justice and health costs.

Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee

The Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee was quite active throughout 1998/1999, producing two new publications. Dr. Marianne Ignace was asked to prepare a Handbook for Aboriginal Language Program Planning, and that Handbook was met with tremendous enthusiasm. The Handbook is now being used to develop a workbook, to provide further support to people working in their communities on the development of language programs.

In addition, the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society (SCES) undertook a research project on behalf of the Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee on Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Programs. That research was intended to outline the current situation in regard to Language Teacher Training, and to outline possible initiatives to address the need for appropriate programs. The findings of the SCES study were used to prepare a funding proposal, *Telling Our Stories, Using Our Voices*, which outlines the possibility of pilot Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Programs to explore this crucial issue further.

At many regional sessions, it was suggested that a handbook for language teachers would also be useful. While language teacher training programs are being developed, a handbook could be an important interim step, to provide useful information on how to prepare and present curricula materials, how to prepare for evaluations, and how to work within the school and classroom environment. Many new language teachers have not had an opportunity to work in a school before, and the experience can be quite intimidating. Explaining common procedures may provide comfort to teachers getting started.

Participant Comments

Nanaimo Regional Session

Participants at the Nanaimo regional session outlined a number of successful initiatives taking place in their area in terms of language and culture programs. For example, four books in the NuuChahNulth language were developed through a cooperative initiative with the School District. Communities in the Nanaimo area also completed a series of books in their language, and work had begun to put those materials on a CD ROM.

Language Teacher Training, however, was noted as an important area for more work. The is a significant shortage of language teachers was highlighted as a pressing issue, and many fluent speakers would benefit from classroom training. The work FNESC is undertaking in this area was strongly supported by the Nanaimo regional session participants.

Williams Lake Regional Session

At Williams Lake, the participants noted that language teachers do not want more workshops; they want programs that will lead to a degree. However, while they want to take such programs, it is often difficult for them to do so because of the timing and location of the programs. Many existing language teachers want to retire, but they are unable to do so because there are too few qualified language teachers to take their place.

Post-Secondary Education Sub-Committee

For several years, the Post-Secondary Education sub-committee has been reviewing developments at the national level in the area of post-secondary education. The National Indian Education Council (NIEC) and DIA were discussing the possibility of implementing a national review of post-secondary education. The NIEC was initially interested in conducting a largely qualitative review to determine the adequacy of the Minister of Indian Affairs' policy, and what can be done to increase success in post-secondary education. DIA, however, appeared to be more interested in a quantitative review. Throughout 1998/1999, FNEC continued to monitor this proposed project, and sought advice from First Nations about how to proceed. At the regional sessions, most participants indicated that the goals of the proposed national review were not clear enough, and that the funding to be provided to each region for its participation (\$17,000.00) was inadequate to allow for a meaningful consideration of post-secondary education issues. FNEC remained committed to becoming involved in a regional review only when it becomes clear that it will be a useful initiative.

Participant Comments

Vancouver Regional Session

At the Vancouver regional session, it was noted that it would be useful to share post-secondary policies amongst First Nations so that people could learn from other interesting policies in place. For example, some communities are testing the implementation of policies that involve students taking loans for their post-secondary education; if the students pass their courses, they do not have to repay the loans, but if they fail, they must repay them. Encouraging the community to accept and implement such a policy has been challenging, but it is resulting in students feeling motivated, accountable, and some students themselves say that the policy is very effective.

PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES

For several years, FNEESC and the MoE have been working to develop a good working relationship, which has begun to have some positive effects. The Ministry has begun sending FNEESC District level data related to Aboriginal education. The data for each relevant school district was distributed at each regional session (discussed below). In addition, the province hired a First Nations person to work on Aboriginal education issues within the curriculum branch, which responded to FNEESC's consistent argument that a First Nations perspective should not be limited to the curriculum for First Nations 12.

Some of the other positive changes that took place in 1998/1999 included a change in the public system accreditation program. Now, every school with more than five First Nations students in a specific grade must include First Nations people in the accreditation process, and include First Nations considerations in the development of school plans for growth and development.

In addition, meetings with a number of "education partners" began in 1998/1999. Those meetings involved FNEESC, the MoE, DIA, the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA), the BC Teachers' Federation, the BC School Trustees' Association, the BC Principal and Vice Principals Association, and the BC School Superintendents' Association, and they were intended to build cooperative efforts toward a common goal – quality education for First Nations students. The efforts have resulted in the signing of a memorandum of understanding, which reads:

We, the undersigned, acknowledge that Aboriginal learners are not experiencing school success in British Columbia. We state our intention to work together within the mandates of our respective organizations to improve school success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia.

The education partners are committed to continue meeting to keep up-to-date on the activities of each organization.

Participant Comments

Prince Rupert

In Prince Rupert, there was also a report on the BC Teachers' Federation Task Force on First Nations education. That Task Force is intended to discuss ways to improve First Nations education. The Task Force undertook regional consultations and research, and was to prepare a document for review at the BCTF Annual General Meeting.

There was also considerable discussion about a new policy of the MoE related to all-day kindergarten. According to the new policy, First Nations children, children with special needs, and ESL children were allowed to attend kindergarten all day, while other children would continue to attend part-time. That extra half day for First Nations children was intended to provide time for language and cultural training, but apparently it is not always being implemented in that way.

The policy also proved to be problematic; many parents felt that it segregated and stereotyped children, and reflected a deficit model of education. In one area, a Principal was insisting that the policy be implemented, in spite of resistance from First Nations parents. It was noted that Principals do not have a right to impose

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the policy. In Prince Rupert, the First Nations Education Council rejected all-day kindergarten, believing that there is insufficient evidence of its usefulness, that that age are too young to be in school all day, and that the negative impacts of all day kindergarten outweighed the benefits. In another community, however, full-day kindergarten was working well, but in that case the children were given a lengthy break at lunch time.

REVIEW OF PROVINCIAL DATA

At the 1998/1999 regional sessions, data collected by the MoE that relates to First Nations students in the public education system was presented and discussed (see appendix one for the provincial level data). There has been a significant increase in data availability throughout the past few years, resulting in large part from the implementation of the provincial education number (PEN).

Generally, the statistics presented at the regional sessions, while demonstrating an unacceptably low level of First Nations student success, were seen to be very useful, and a good snapshot of the public school system. The statistics reflect what First Nations representatives have argued for years, and it was thought that the data would help FNEESC and First Nations communities in their negotiations with School Districts, the MoE, and other relevant stakeholders in First Nations education.

In many of the regional sessions, the data regarding First Nations students in special needs categories resulted in considerable discussion, and it was noted that the overrepresentation of First Nations students in this area reflects the problem of “dumping” First Nations learners into special needs categories, rather than dealing constructively with underlying, systemic problems.

Participant Comments

Campbell River Regional Session

The Campbell River regional session participants felt that it is important to remember that the data summarized by the MoE is not the only important measure of student success. The public school system does not reflect the traditional ways of teaching, and spiritual needs of students are not met by the schools. Many

children are very skilled in traditional pursuits, although they experience less success at school. Those children should be encouraged to follow their strengths, and not all children should be expected to go to University and become doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Various kinds of successes should be recognized and valued.

Prince Rupert

The participants at the Prince Rupert regional session made a similar observation, noting the importance of not focusing only on the statistics, and making students succeed according to the criteria highlighted. Equally important are issues such as language and cultural development, and the comfort of students in public schools.

FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION (FNSA)

The FNEESC continues to work very closely with the FNSA to avoid an overlap in efforts, and both organizations remain committed to undertaking communication and research efforts to support the work of First Nations schools.

At the second FNSA Annual General Meeting (AGM) held in April, 1998, the membership asked that the existing Board of Directors continue to sit for one more year. The existing Board members agreed to this request, and there was an election to fill one vacant seat on the Board, with Corrine Cahoose of Ulkatcho Band School selected to fill that position. A commitment was also made to design a structure for regional representation on the Board prior to the 1999 elections. A proposed regional structure was distributed to all members in the upcoming months for review and feedback, for finalization at the 1998/1999 AGM.

For 1998/1999, most of the activities of the FNSA were undertaken in cooperation with the FNEESC through Gathering Strength funding. Nationally, \$8 million was made available by DIA for education initiatives, and of that funding \$1.2 million was provided to BC region. The DIA regional office provided some of that funding to a number of communities and education organizations for specific projects, and the FNEESC and FNSA also received funding for a special needs project (discussed below), and capacity building in First Nations schools.

Among the initiatives that took place were workshops on school evaluations, and research related to school governance, school calendars, and parental involvement in schools. In addition, the FNSA, in cooperation with FNEESC, implemented a project on curriculum development. Also, a large proportion of the funding was distributed directly to First Nations schools for the implementation of local

initiatives. Background packages were prepared for schools by the FNSA/FNESC office, and following the project implementation period, information about the initiatives undertaken by each school was collected and shared amongst school to share ideas about successful projects.

The FNSA is also interested in working to establish economies of scale whenever possible, to allow First Nations schools to access better services at reduced costs for First Nations schools. In an initial attempt to address this issue, information was distributed to assess the possibility of establishing a group benefits program. In addition, the FNSA hopes to eventually facilitate other cooperative efforts, such as the collective design of professional development days by a group of schools in a particular area.

Finally, the FNSA continued to implement the Seventh Generation Club – a club aimed at encouraging First Nations students to stay-in-school and make healthy life choices. An added benefit to that program was a donation from the Grizzlies Foundation of books and money for the purchase of resources for school libraries. That funding was distributed to all FNSA members in 1998.

The FNSA published an Annual Report for 1997/1998, which was distributed at the regional sessions.

Participant Comments

Cranbrook Regional Session

At the Cranbrook regional session, there was significant discussion regarding the special needs project, and the participants generally expressed agreement with the process, and provided significant input into a parents special needs handbook.

Osoyoos Regional Session

In Osoyoos, the regional session participants indicated a desire for more samples of successful initiatives in First Nations schools, and an expansion of the FNSA Best Practices Handbook. They felt that school must be implementing worthwhile programs, and a sharing of those efforts would benefit all schools.

Prince George Regional Session

At the Prince George regional session, there was some discussion of First Nations schools evaluation, and the initiative to be undertaken by the FNSA in that area. It was noted that the federal government was increasingly raising questions about accountability and assessment of First Nations schools, and would likely start requiring schools to undertake work in this area soon. Parents, it was suggested, are also interested in school evaluations, so that they can be shown what is working and what is not working in terms of school operations. It is important, therefore, that an evaluation process be developed which is relevant to First Nations schools. However, it was also argued that public schools be provided funding for evaluations, as well as resources to implement changes and respond to evaluation results. It is important that education councils and committees not be asked to assess what they are doing with no resources to do so properly.

THE INDIAN STUDIES SUPPORT PROGRAM (ISSP)

FNESC offers technical support to the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) Committee through a fee-for-service arrangement. This arrangement is intended to allow for a sharing of communication functions, and efforts to work collectively to better serve First Nations communities. The ISSP makes recommendations regarding DIA funding for post-secondary programs for First Nations students. An update on ISSP activities and proposal information was shared at the FNESC regional sessions.

Kamloops Regional Session

In Kamloops, the regional session participants noted that more information about the distribution of ISSP funding would be useful, including a better idea of the approval process, who was funded each year, and what programs are being supported through the ISSP.

A TOLL-FREE NUMBER

FNESC, the FNSA and the ISSP Committee have all agreed to the joint establishment of a toll-free number to improve the ability of communities to access the office. That number is 1-877-422-3672.

YOUTH PROGRAMS

In 1997/1998, FNEESC and the FNSA again implemented four programs for First Nations youth. Those programs include the Summer Student Career Placement Program, the Summer Science and Technology Camp Initiative, the Cooperative Education Program, and the Youth Work Experience Program. FNEESC and the FNSA made every effort to respond to concerns raised about the administration of those programs, but the overwhelming number of proposals received in comparison to the funding available for distribution continued to be a problem. Funding decisions were even more difficult in 1998/1999 due to an increase in the number and quality of proposals received. The success of the programs, however, was very evident, and final reports submitted to the FNEESC/FNSA office continued to be shared amongst all communities and with DIA to demonstrate the value of the youth programs.

FNEESC will continue to seek input from communities regarding whether it should continue to be involved with the distribution of the youth program funding. If FNEESC is deemed to be an appropriate body for this task, and FNEESC will strive to respond to suggestions for improving funding distribution mechanisms. Generally, the regional sessions expressed satisfaction with the way in which the youth programs are administered, and expressed support for a change in the distribution of the Summer Student Career Placement Program to a base plus per capita allocation formula.

Participants Comments

Osoyoos Regional Session

In Osoyoos, one community did express concern about the administration of the youth programs through the FNEESC and FNSA office, and indicated that the funding should instead be distributed by DIA.

TARGETED FUNDING

One of the areas in which FNEESC was active throughout 1997/1998 involved the possibility that the Minister of Education would end the targeting of dollars for Aboriginal language and culture programs. FNEESC responded strongly to that threat and participated in an advisory committee, gathered and shared input from First Nations regarding this issue, and spoke out in favour of continued targeting. At the *Nexw7ay Conference* in November, 1998, Paul Ramsey, Minister of Education, announced that he was committed to a continuation of targeted funding.

One change in terms of targeted funding occurred in 1998/1999, related to the 1701 forms. In previous years, those forms had required that each student have access to 16 hours of direct instruction through programs funded with the targeted dollars. That provision was seen to be very problematic, as some very worthwhile programs which were having a positive impact on students did not meet the 16 hour criteria. The forms were therefore changed to require that the allocation of the funding must include consultation with parents of Aboriginal children.

At many regional sessions, that provision was also noted as problematic, as it was unclear how many parents must provide consent, how such consent must be demonstrated, and the role of First Nations governments and organizations in targeted funding negotiations. Discussions about the wording of 1701 forms will continue, but the regional session participants generally agreed that the Ministry's willingness to consider changes is a positive sign.

Participant Comments

Prince George Regional Session

At the Prince George regional session, participants expressed concern about a lack of input by many First Nations into the use of targeted funding, and a lack of understanding in terms of who signs off the allocation of the dollars and what can be done with the funding. For example, some School Districts want to use 10% of the targeted funding for negotiations of Local Education Agreements, which is not an effective use of the funds. In addition, some School Districts want to use the funding for general special needs programming, which is not the intention of the targeted dollars. The level of cooperation between First Nations and School Districts throughout the province is inconsistent, and in many areas efforts to improve this situation must continue.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

The meeting participants then had a lengthy discussion about special needs education, and a number of relevant initiatives being undertaken by FNEESC and the FNSA.

At the 1997/1998 regional sessions, a proposal titled *None Left Behind* was distributed and discussed. At those sessions, it was agreed that the proposal represented only an initial effort to address this important issue, and that the \$6.5 million it requested in the *None Left Behind* proposal would not be enough funding to address the current need in BC. However, support was also given for the proposal and any other initiatives to lobby for funding for special education in First Nations schools. The *None Left Behind* proposal was subsequently submitted to DIA, and regional office said that in order to fund the proposal a written submission to Treasury Board would be required. It was further suggested that to support such a submission, better data to prove the extent of special needs in BC would be useful. FNEESC therefore submitted a proposal to DIA regional office requesting interim funding to undertake research and collect the necessary data, to implement planning workshops to consider in detail the implementation of the *None Left Behind* proposal, and to produce an informational video from 5 – 8 minutes long to introduce the issue of special needs education and raise some key points for discussion.

The second day of the 1998/1999 FNEESC regional sessions were set aside for the special needs planning workshops. In those sessions, the participants considered the question of how the \$6.5 million requested for special needs services might be distributed if the *None Left Behind* proposal was funded in the future. Generally, the regional session participants agreed that a list of options should be prepared

and distributed prior to the FNSA Annual General Meeting (AGM), with a final decision made at that time (see Appendix One for the final list of options created). Most of the participants supported a distribution process controlled by the FNEESC and FNSA, and argued that the FNSA Directors best understand the needs of First Nations schools because of their direct experience working in them. The participants also made it very clear that all schools must have reasonable access to special needs funding, as special needs services are a necessity for school operations, not a “perk.”

The participants were also asked to review a series of special needs information handbooks and provide comments and suggestions. Those suggestions were used to revise and finalize the handbooks. At several sessions, participants asked that an additional handbook for parents be prepared. Such a handbook could include suggestions for providing support to students in the home, parents’ rights and responsibilities, and how to overcome parents’ denial, perhaps through speaking with other parents who have children with special needs. It was noted that parents who learn that their children have special needs can feel devastated, and information that is easily accessible and straightforward can help them to overcome guilt and accept their children’s challenges and strengths.

At the regional sessions, there was also a brief review of the special needs research that was about to be initiated. FNEESC and the FNSA were to enter into partnership with a University to collect the data required to support a Treasury Board submission. The data collection was to involve assessing a number of students, using consistent instruments and definitions. The results expected from the research were to include data demonstrating the incidence of special needs in First Nations schools in BC, as well some recommendations about the appropriateness of existing assessment tools and definitions.

In the early stages of designing this research, a number of questions arose. One important issue involved the ownership of information resulting from the research. FNEESC could not reach an acceptable agreement with a University in terms of who would control and publish the research. The regional session participants agreed that this crucial issue must be resolved before any work went further. Given no resolution with a University, FNEESC contracted with an independent but fully qualified researcher to undertake this work.

Another important question related to permission slips, and what information is needed by parents in order to obtain their informed consent for testing. At all of the regional sessions, the participants indicated that the researchers should work with the schools and community liaison workers to determine how best to obtain parental permission, which will likely require personal meetings with parents to explain the project, the testing procedures, and to make them aware that there is no stigma attached to children who are tested.

In terms of choosing schools for the testing, it was agreed that all schools have a desperate need for information and access to specialists. Unfortunately, not all schools could be included in this phase of the research process given time and financial constraints. A representative sample of schools has to be chosen. The regional participants suggested that FNEESC send out a form asking schools to indicate their interest in taking part in the research, asking them the approximate number of students needing to be assessed, and what support the school could offer. It was also suggested that the form ask for an indication of whether the school could work in partnership with a neighbouring school to have a greater number of students tested in one location. If the number of interested schools was still too great given the time and funding available, it was agreed that there should be an unbiased selection of the schools to participate, taking into consideration issues such as proximity to an urban centre, BC regions, and school size.

At several regional sessions, participants noted that even in the public school system, too many students with special needs do not have their needs met, and limited resources is a significant problem. Too often, there are long waiting lists for students requiring assessments, there is no space for students requiring alternate programs and they are therefore left in classes that are not equipped to assist them, and inadequate services are available to respond to assessment results.

Participant Comments

Campbell River Regional Session

At the Campbell River regional session, there was a lengthy discussion about early literacy. Many students, it was noted, are not experiencing success in this area, but they do not have identifiable special needs. There is a fear that these children will slip through the cracks and not have their needs addressed, and that they will not be supported so that they can achieve success. These students are sometimes referred to as those in the “grey area,” and there is a need for more information about what is happening to these children.

One participant at the session also highlighted an interesting arrangement between a First Nations school and a public school. In that case, a teacher employed in the public system works in the First Nations school one day a week, providing assistance to teachers and spending time with students. The arrangement is quite inexpensive for the First Nations school, and is proving to help the students make an easier transition to the public school system.

Kitimaat Regional Session

In Kitimaat, several participants raised the issue of special needs and adult programs – an important concern that is too often overlooked. It was noted that too many students are pushed through the public education system without their

special needs being met. Those individuals often return to school through First Nations adult education programs, which unfortunately are not provided adequate resources to support the adults.

Lillooet Regional Session

Tom Watkinson, Acting Principal of Lillooet Secondary School, attended the Lillooet session, and outlined what services school districts are expected to provide for First Nations students.

As children enter high school, many of them have been identified as having special needs, but many others have not yet been tested. There are three levels of testing in the public system. The school special education teacher undertakes preliminary testing to indicate whether or not a child should go to the district level assessor. If necessary, the district assessor can then send a child to a psychologist or a testing centre, which can cost up to \$12,000.00. For students identified as having severe behavioural problems, public schools are allocated \$6,000.00, so that if a school has 5 or 6 students with those challenges, the school is able to hire a teaching assistant. For students with physical disabilities, \$12,000.00 is allocated to the school, as those students must have a teaching assistant with them at all times. The regional session participants noted that services to children with special needs have declined due to cuts in funding.

Checklists from the Ministry of Education (MoE) are usually used to give some indication of whether a child should be put onto an individual education plan (IEP). Last year, in his school there were 126 students on IEPs, and most of those were First Nations students. Children on IEPs can receive assistance from teaching assistants, and in his school there is also a peer helping program. Students can move off IEPs into regular programming when sufficient progress has been made.

The regional session participants reiterated that special needs funding is separate from targeted funding. Teaching assistants can be hired with targeted funding, depending upon the agreement between the School District and the First Nations. Generally, language and culture programs are funded through targeted funding, as are First Nations support worker positions.

All of the meeting participants expressed a hope that School Districts find better ways to work cooperatively with First Nations and share resources. To date, there has been little support for First Nations schools from the school districts, which is unfortunate. It is extremely frustrating that there is a duplication of resources, materials and services, and staff exchanges and visits would be very useful. Too often, the level of cooperation depends to a great extent upon the individuals involved.

Nanaimo Regional Session

In Nanaimo, the participants raised the fact that all stakeholders must be provided information about how to support learners with special needs, including parents, educators, community members, and politicians.

Funding for special education, it was also argued, is a central concern of First Nations schools. Now, schools must be very creative with their funding to meet the needs of their students, and funding needed for other program areas must sometimes be used for special education. However, there is a limit to the effectiveness of such “creativity,” so that necessary materials and supplies are often simply not available. Also, First Nations schools have difficulty paying teachers according to their qualifications, so that many schools cannot retain good staff.

Prince George Regional Session

The Prince George participants briefly considered how the limited resources available for special needs initiatives at the provincial level should be used, and they indicated that training workshops would be an excellent way to provide information to people, who could then make use of what they learned in their communities.

OTHER ISSUES RAISED

Funding -- Nanaimo, Prince George Regional Session

In Nanaimo, significant concern was raised regarding the federal government's requirement that First Nations schools meet provincial standards, while inadequate funding is provided to allow them to do so. It was suggested that FNEESC and the FNSA continue to investigate this crucial issue.

At the Prince George regional sessions, there was also a substantial discussion regarding funding issues, and what was noted as a "crisis" in resource availability. Concern was also expressed about Financial Transfer Agreements (FTAs), which are seen as being forced on First Nations, although the restrictive nature of their budget arrangements is causing some First Nations to resist their imposition. FTAs will likely continue to cause significant concern.

In addition, a question was raised about the role of DIA funding services officers (FSOs). FSOs, it was argued, are supposed to notify First Nations about funding opportunities and how to access resources and services. That role, however, is not always being fulfilled, which was seen to be indicative of the federal government's general inability to communicate effectively with First Nations communities.

LEAs – Prince George Regional Session

Participants at the Prince George regional session expressed significant frustration in regard to local education agreements (LEAs). Too often, it was argued, School Districts are not cooperating with LEA negotiations, which is causing tremendous difficulties. The process depends to a significant extent on the relationship between each School District and First Nation, which makes supporting LEAs

challenging. It was suggested, however, that First Nations representatives can assist their LEA negotiations by attending School Board meetings on an ongoing basis, learning from areas where successful LEAs are in place, and using the statistics now available through the Ministry of Education to support their negotiations.

Ministry of Education Materials – Nanaimo Regional Session

At the Nanaimo regional session, the participants commented upon three new resources prepared by the Ministry of Education (MoE). The *Curriculum Planning Guide*, which outlines suggestions for putting together curriculum and information related to First Nations content in public schools, *Shared Learnings*, which promotes the inclusion of First Nations content in the K-10 curriculum, and the *Nisga'a Treaty Teaching Modules*, were all seen as useful resources. It is important, the participants argued, to include First Nations content in public schools, as even many First Nations students are not aware of their own histories. Too often, people dismiss resources without reviewing them thoroughly, and it is very important that information be distributed as much as possible.

National Education Initiatives – Prince George Regional Session

In Prince George, questions were raised about the structure of education committees at the national level. Chief Nathan Matthew reported that the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) sponsors a Chiefs Committee on Education (CCoE), which provides political support for education initiatives, as well a National Indian Education Council (NIEC) which provides technical support to the Chiefs. The AFN Vice Chief for each region is responsible for sponsoring a regional representative to the CCoE, and the CCoE meets approximately two or three times per year.

Parental Involvement in Schools -- Nanaimo Regional Session

In Nanaimo, the participants raised the challenging issue of the home environment and student success. Generally, many people do not like to talk about this controversial issue, but it is a key aspect of education. In Nanaimo, at workshops with parents, students and educators, students sent a strong message about the lack of reading materials in their homes. Parents should be encouraged and assisted so that they can support their children, to ensure that their basic needs met, and so that parents also know how to create a better learning environment in the home.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Campbell River Regional Session

Charlene Alfred	Namgis First Nation
Shelley Cook	Namgis School Board
Dawn Duncan	Kwanwatsi Playschool
John Frishholz	School District #72
Mia Frishholz	School District #72
Roberta Gunderson	Campbell River First Nation
Nancy Henderson	Campbell River Band
Marion Hunt	Kwakiult Band
Scott Hutton	Kwakiutl District Council
Diane Matilpe	School District #72
Marnie McMann	School District #72
Melanie Ordano	School District #72
Bob Pollard	Campbell River Band
Rick Raesley	T'lisa'lagi'lakw School
Nora Underwood	School District #72
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Cranbrook Regional Session

Craig Hillman	Ktunaxa Independent School System
Denise Louie	Lower Kootenay Indian Band
Sandra Small	St. Mary's Indian Band
Mike White	
Barbara West	Ktunaxa Independent School System
Christa Williams	FNESC

Kamloops Regional Session

Donna Lee Johnson	Interior Indian Friendship Centre
Lori Pilon	Secwepemc Cultural Education Society
Jack Smith	Sketchestn First Nation
Chief Nathan Matthew	Chiefs Action Committee

** a complete attendance list is not available for this session

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Kitimaat Regional Session

Theresa Abou	Iskut Band
Yunuss Ali	Kitimaat Village Council
Carol Dennis	Iskut Band
Pam Derrick	Dease River Band Council
Sadie Harris	Gitskan Government
Ray Jones	Gitsegukla Community Education
Sandra Martin	FNESC
Ron Mitchell	Kyah Wiget Education Society
Nancy Nyce	Kitimaat Village Council
Patience Pederson	Kyah Wiget Education Society
Jackie Santa	School District #92
Holly Smith	Moricetown Elementary School
Elaine Stewart	Kitimaat Village Council
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Lytton Regional Session

Gladys Grenier	Lytton First Nation
Rita Hogan	Lytton First Nation
Darwyn John	Nt'akmenlhalha School
Joyce McBride	Lytton First Nation
Marilyn Napoleon	Lillooet Tribal Council
Delores O'Danaghy	Boston Bar
Anita Patrick	N'Qua'qua
Myrna Wallace	Mount Currie
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Nanaimo Regional Session

Barbara Barltrop	Nanoose First Nation
Patti Edwards	Nanoose First Nation
Reinouw Abbott	Snaw Naw As School
Craig Meredith	Chemainus First Nation
Jack Smith	Chemainus Native College
Barbara White	Nanaimo First Nation
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Osoyoos Regional Session

Theresa Dennis	Lower Similkameen Indian Band
Clarence Louie	Osoyoos Indian Band
Ramona Louie	Osoyoos Indian Band
Florence MacArthur	Penticton Indian Band
Connie Waters	
Mrie Matthew	Neqweyqwelsten School
Chief Nathan Matthew	Chiefs Action Committee
Christa Williams	FNESC

Prince George Regional Session

Connie Big	Fort St. James
Andy	Fort Nelson
Sue Ketlo	Nadleh Koh
Dan LeGrandeur	Halfway River
Monty Palmantier	Lake Babine Nation
Mark Prince	Nakazdli Nation
Amelia Stark	TI'azten Nation
Chief Nathan Matthew	Chiefs Action Committee
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

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Prince Rupert Regional Session

Charlotte Anderson	Hartley Bay
Marlene Clifton	Port Edward
Oliver Clifton	Prince Rupert
Pansy Collison	Prince Rupert
Leanne Guizzo	Kitkatla
Barbara Helin	Lax KwAlaams
Ernie Hill	Hartley Bay School
Debbie Jeffrey	Prince Rupert
Debbie Leighton-Stephens	Prince Rupert
Desmond Morris	Prince Rupert
Coretta O'Brien	Prince Rupert
Rob Rickey	Kitkatla
Gail Russ	Skidegate
Lisa Shoop	Skidegate
Eva Spencer	Skidegate
Hazel Stewart	Kincolith
Judy Thompson	Prince Rupert
Darlene Young	Prince Rupert
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Vancouver Regional Session

Joan Adams	Sto:lo Nation
Lesley Williams	Sto:lo Nation
Wayne Bobb	Seabird Island First Nation
Georgina Nelson	Mount Currie School Board
Derek Payne	Sto:lo Nation
Dee Peters	Yale First Nation
Janice Pierre	Mount Currie School Board
Sandra Victor	Cheam First Nation
Myrna Wallace	Lil'wat Post-Secondary Education
Christa Williams	FNESC
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC

Williams Lake Regional Session

Michelle Archie	Canim Lake Band
Marilyn Belleau	Esketemc First Nation
Corinne Cahoose	Ulkatcho Education
Mamie Hall	Cariboo Chilcotin
Janie Ann Jack	Ulkatcho First Nation
Robert Phillips	Cariboo Tribal Council
Debbie Robbins	Tooset Indian Band
Gloria Tzath	Ulkatcho First Nation
Agnes William	Xeni Gwet'in First Nation
Priscilla William	Xeni Gwet'in First Nation
Chief Nathan Matthew	Chiefs Action Committee
Barb Kavanagh	FNESC